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With friends like these, who needs enemies?

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Body

"I wouldn't join any club that would have me as a member," ace wisecracker Groucho Marx famously said. As with any durable putdown, contained within its smart-ass punch is a worthy insight, the wisdom of the tamer proverb: "You can tell a person's character by the company he keeps."

The line should be haunting the pretentious Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Sciences?) this year, as, starting with Harvey Weinstein, various luminaries of its exalted membership have been revealed one by one to be either sexual marauders or keepers of the silence around sexual marauders. Who wants to join the club that's exalted Harvey Weinstein? The academy is a prize example of the Groucho rule. Now, the Liberals will never challenge Groucho for quips and putdowns, but lately, they've been making a bid in the slapstick and farce department. They boldly announced a month or so ago that they were going after "tax cheats" and scurrilous "evaders," like store clerks who get in-house discounts and family farmers who shamelessly make use of tax "loopholes." You know, the very rich at Home Hardware and the back forty.

It wasn't long before both the PM and his finance minister were tangled up in their own net, with questions about numbered companies and family trusts, falling back on the increasingly ineffectual ethics commissioner Mary Dawson as an excuse for sailing so close to their own ethical guidelines. Then came the Paradise Papers and tales of Liberal-friendly billionaires with offshore accounts - all legal of course, but rather tawdry coming from so righteous a government. As comedy it rivalled the closet scene in the classic A Night at the Opera.

Halloween gave them a temporary lift. Trudeau and his environment minister Catherine McKenna delightfully went with the spirit of the day - he by showing up dressed as Clark Kent/Superman, and her by showing up in a green Lone Ranger mask and ***climate activist*** T-shirt. Underneath, the unctuous caption: "We all need to be superheroes in the fight against climate change." If a riposte is needed to put that sullen "climate Barbie" slur finally to rest, that photo is it. This is a serious ministry.

But even superheroes have their off days, and it was not long before the masked ***climate activist*** supplied an example. From McKenna's Twitter feed came this curious? odd? startling? inexplicable? effusion: "Canada salutes Nicaragua and Syria for joining on to the Paris Agreement!" Note the exclamation mark, high signal of enthusiasm and approval.

It took but minutes for this tweet to generate a near universal outcry of puzzlement and wonder. Outside of North Korea, which has also signed on to the Paris Accord, Syria has the most despicable and murderous government in the world. What in Heaven's name was the Minister of Environment and Climate Change up to, offering effusive congratulations to Bashar al-Assad? And what in Heaven's name can Bashar al-Assad offer to the oft-invoked "climate community" that has our tranquil nation saluting him? Has he promised to cut back fighter jet traffic in the bombing of his own citizens? Does displacing some two to three million Syrian citizens count in some sadistic way

in cutting back on Syria's carbon emissions? Has he pledged to cut back on the gas attack emissions? McKenna, to be fair, was not alone here. Out of the great march of the penguins, the UN Convention on Climate Change COP 23 in Bonn, Germany (25,000 in attendance), came near-equal raves, all eagerly noting that, with Syria signing on, only Donald Trump was out of the accord.

It says something about the monomania of the avid climate change crusaders that they will reach for any grimy stick with which to beat Trump, even if the stick in question is the hideous and murderous dictator of Syria. The repeated headline the world over was this: Syria Plans to Sign the Paris Climate Deal. That Makes the U.S. the Only UN Country Opposing It. If that's what it takes to bash Trump, well then Welcome Bashar.

Has the COP 23 club not heard of Groucho Marx? Who wants to be part of a club that welcomes Bashar al-Assad to its membership? That welcomes a sign-on from the hell-state of Kim Jong Un? Naturally, McKenna backtracked on the tweet, blaming it first on staff, then taking responsibility for it. But it's not clear she drew the real message of her error, or understands why pariahs such as North Korea and Syria see advantage in joining the club of planet-savers - even as they savage the citizens of the part of the planet they actually control.

Let's try to point to the moral here. There is nothing so convenient (and empty) for signalling political virtue than what is ludicrously called "making a commitment to halt climate change." If such a move appeals to Bashar al Assad and Kim Jong Un, what value is it, and what truth can be in it? !@COPYRIGHT=© 2017 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Graphic

Adrian Wyld, The Canadian Press Files; Environment Minister Catherine McKenna;

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